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Randy Lee

Marcia O'Kelly

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RANDY LEE

MARCIA O'KELLY*

Randy Lee joined the faculty of the North Dakota School of Law one year after I did. I cannot imagine the Law School or the University without him.

Randy loved the law and he loved higher education. As their common foundation is self-governance grounded in rules, he cared deeply about rules—in the University Senate as well as in Professional Responsibility, Corporations, and Conflicts of Law. He understood and taught that taking rules seriously protects substance as well as procedure. He willingly, if not cheerfully, undertook such thankless tasks as Faculty Rights and University Constitutions because he knew they mattered. He made the University a better place than it could have been without him.

He made the Law School a richer place than it would have been without him. While he could easily have settled into teaching his core courses as he had first developed them, he instead repeatedly risked time and effort to adopt new casebooks and to experiment with new courses or new ways of teaching old courses. Teaching law was for him a very full-time profession but he somehow found time for complex State and National Bar Association work and for the most time-consuming Law School committees. He was also remarkably generous with his time and energy in helping colleagues. I was touched but not surprised when, during the summer he spent in Virginia caring for his dying mother, he found time to write a serious line by line critique of a custody article I was wrestling with.

Randy loved poetry—serious poetry by others and not-so-serious poetry that he occasionally wrote. I treasure, for example, his ode celebrating my then one-year-old grandson twirling his socks as if they were propellers. Randy was too modest for conventional literary or scholarly publication, but his memoranda had qualities of both—apart from their excessive semicolons. He was genuinely interested in everything. He delighted in sending clippings and comments to others about their disciplines and particular interests. He was also delighted by those rare occasions when someone could send or tell him something he didn't know yet, about law or music or restaurants or baseball or any other human endeavor.

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Randy loved gossip, which I believe was a reflection, though not always entirely benign, of his affection for people. He had an extraordinary gift for friendship and a wonderful ability to keep in touch with former students and colleagues as well as with generations of old friends. He felt immense satisfaction in the professional and personal successes of his present and former students.

Randy cared so much and so effectively about learning and teaching and about his students and colleagues that I don't have to try to imagine the Law School or the University without him. Because he made them better and richer than they would otherwise have been, they will never be without him.